

Empathy

Janet K. Wallace

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Summary

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Description:

It's Bobby Corwen's one year anniversary and Vivi's son, with the aid of his friends, is preparing a huge party for the young little Chocobo.

1. Empathy

A/N: This fic has been in development hell since last year as part of a writing challenge from the Final Fantasy IX Writers Guild Discord group. For anyone interested in joining in, please DM me. Special thanks to JotaTe, Anti-Broadcast, Josh1013 and Bart 415, they are some of the greatest writers this fandom has ever witnessed. Thank you and have a nice day!

Before the Green Chocobo's crowing could announce the sunrise, I saw Mr. 288 woke up early in the morning. He left his house and the first place where he went was the graveyard. He stays there for a while, remaining in a silent and thoughtful position until he goes somewhere else in the village. That's how he begins each day and ends every night, standing before his buried comrades, with a grim reminder that someday he will stop like one of them.

— Life grows in a small pond as it does in a deep ocean. — Said Mr. 288, sharing some of his wisdom.

— What does that mean? — I asked.

— I want to hear it from you. — He replied, without giving me an answer.

— I'm not sure if that's the answer I have in mind. — I said, but Mr. 288 ignored me. What he really wanted to hear was my interpretation of his words.

— Well, I want to hear it anyway. — He said. Mr. 288 likes to philosophize as a pastime and he always gives everyone a chance to speak by themselves. It's one of the things I admire most about him.

— Okay. Uh... — At first, I struggled a bit with words, but I felt them coming out. Knowing that Mr. 288 usually spoke about life in metaphors, I had an almost clear image of what he meant to say. — So, water... Yes, water is essential to all living beings. We all need water. Without it, we do not live, we get sick, we just feel wrong. You could say water... Well, water is knowledge. Knowledge of what is needed for us to live. It pours from the clouds, it's near the riverbanks, even a desert has water below it, or else there would be no life in it.

— Hmmm... — Mr. 288 seems to be listening to what I'm saying. I wonder if he knows what I'm

saying, because I don't.

— Knowledge, water... The same thing, I suppose. — I continued my existential rambling. — There are those who are thirsty for knowledge, and those who drink too much. There are some kinds of water people don't wanna drink because it's dirt, because it's sparkling water and the taste sucks, some people want water but none of that is given to them while other people have too much water on their hands and don't want to share it... Look, I have no idea what I'm saying.

— I appreciate your way of thinking. — He said, contemplative as usual.

— Yes, but you're the one who holds the true answer.

— Do I? I'm not sure if I do. We all have our own interpretations of life and its wonders. There isn't one explanation of something which is more important than the other.

— I know. — I said, then Mr. 288 returned to his introspection. Out of all Black Mages, he sure is a fascinating fellow.

— Do you want to hear what I have to say? — He asked, to which I nodded. — Very well. I also

picture water as knowledge. Knowledge of what is needed, of what is clear and what is useful. Water quenches thirst, it diminishes our pain of not knowing everything, it's part of our nature. There is no place on this planet where water does not coexist with the living beings. It's in the air around us, the ground beneath us, it's also within ourselves. We are made of water, the world has plenty of water in it. Tell me, would you consider an ocean to be far more important than a small pond?

— What? — That was sudden, but I'm sure I can answer that one. — No. because both have water in it.

— You are correct. All bodies of water hold a lot of life in it. Things we can see with the eyes and things we don't. Just because an ocean is much bigger than a pond it does not mean that the first shall be praised and the latter to be ignored for what it is.

— Are we still talking about knowledge? Because I can't see a whale fit inside a pond. It's too big! — I said.

— Heh heh... You have plenty of imagination. — Mr. 288 said, smiling.

— Just a silly thought. Nothing important.

— Sometimes we have to be silly. It's part of what makes this world so charming to live in.

— I agree. — I said, adjusting my hat as the sun rays appeared between the woods.

— You remind me of a friend who's no longer here. — Mr. 288 was referring to Vivi, a father I've never met, but I and my siblings heard a lot of good things about him. — Something bothering you?

— Not really. — I could tell it was the graveyard, but I feel a kind of peace by standing in here. I see no need to lie about my well-being. — It's just... I feel like this whenever I listen to your words.

— My words?

— Yeah. Like, you just came with better words than I did, and I feel so... So... How do I say this?

— Overwhelmed?

— No. Wait, yes. Well, kinda. I'm not sure. It's like I'm a fool near you.

— I understand. But, if it weren't for your words, I wouldn't be able to share mine.

Knowledge is not something that belongs to the old, he meant to say. We talked and talked and talked for what felt like hours about how some people prefer to remain ignorant of reality, while others seek refuge in knowledge that explains a little of reality. Knowledge, as a whole, is not something restricted to certain people of a certain age, nor should it be sealed within the walls of a “House of Knowledge”, forbidden for anyone outside to trespass. With life comes plenty of experience, but The old shall learn lessons from the young as well. Their voices are never meant to be unheard, they should not be treated as empty vessels.

Mr. 288 was one of the first Black Mages who ever achieved sentience. He was so disgusted by seeing blood in his hands for the first time that he and his other companions who have also awakened have run away and built this village where they would be safe. Black Mage No. 192 once described being used as a weapon as “Moving his body without feeling the skin”, while No. 239 said he was “cursed with an absolute freedom of thought” at the moment he became aware of his actions. I still can’t believe the Mages used to be treated as disposable weapons, helpless puppets being manipulated in some major scheme.

— You know, today is a day where the young become older. — Mr. 288 said, still carrying his enigmatic words.

I was about to say something when I heard a familiar noise...

— KWEH!

Those were Bobby Corwen's first words, as soon as he hatched out of an egg. To be fair, he does not say anything other than Kweh! It's Kweh to this, Kweh to that... And he is happy. Always happy. He chews worms for breakfast, lunch and dinner, but he also eats corn, carrots, pickles, he does not like peanuts very much, but when Bobby is hungry he eats anything, I swear. Bobby is so courageous he once fought a snake THIS size! But he threw it away because it was not tasty...

Bobby was born before I was even born. His mom passed away but No. 33 and No. 111 took care of him until the day he took his first breath. When Bobby was born, the Black Mages raised the chocobo chick with love and affection, naming him the all-mighty Bobby Corwen!

And people said we were soulless puppets, heartless instruments of war, but we all felt something inside when Bobby arrived. It was the end of the world, but life found its way to flourish amidst havoc and chaos. There was despair... But also hope. Zidane and his friends defeated Kuja's menace and so they gave the world a chance to become a better place.

A world where Bobby lives happily, chewing people's hair. Oh wait...

— OUCHIE! — Eiko yelled. — Is that such a way to treat a young lady, huh?

— Bobby, This little girl is not edible. Not at all... — Garnet hid her mouth, but it was obvious she was forcing herself to not laugh.

— Of course I'm not! — And Eiko got angry, like a volcano who awakened from its deep slumber, and instead of lava, tears came out of her eyes.

— Bitter like that... — Garnet said, as Eiko shut her mouth in order to not say something worse. She is a Princess, she has class and a reputation to preserve.

— Kweh! — Bobby does not care, he insists on chewing the young lady's hair. He does not have any

intention to upset anyone, it's just the way he is.

— Again, why me!? — I could see fire in Eiko's eyes, and then Bobby licked her face. — No words.

— Kweh! — And that's all Bobby says and has ever said. He looks a bit frightened by looking around the world he never saw outside of the village.

There is so little green in Alexandria and the skies are orange like, well... an orange? I can't think of anything else in this world that is as intense and warm as Alexandria's evening skies. Tangerine, perhaps? Why am I thinking about food, am I hungry?

— Almost home. — Said Garnet, looking at her kingdom from the window of the carriage.

— We could have been brought here by Airship, though. — Eiko complained a lot along the way... She said words I thought my ears were prepared to hear along the way.

— Don't be scared, Bobby. — I said, patting the chocobo's head. When he looks at me, Bobby is not so scared at all. He grew up alongside Black Mages like me. — Everything looks so big, isn't it?

— Not until you get to travel all around the world. — Eiko replied. — I feel like I've seen everything, and I'm only seven! I helped Zidane kick the butt of a metaphysical concept, and when I tell my parents about it they don't believe me.

— Bobby isn't fully grown yet, but one day he'll spread his wings and fly like a golden Chocobo! Maybe we can play Hot and Cold together. Imagine finding a whole lost civilization underneath Gaia, that would be cool...

— Uh huh. — Said Eiko, with a sassy expression in face. — After all we went through, I don't want any more adventures. No more.

— For now... — I said, aware that peace does not last for too long. I do believe everything is fine, but sometimes, when everything's too calm, there is a chance we feel like living in a state of bliss when someone is having a bad day and we don't know.

— Finally! — Eiko exclaimed. My ears hurt. — We have arrived at Alexandria Castle!

— Follow me, Bobby! — I said to the chocobo, as we left the carriage towards the giant boat crossing the river that surrounds the castle. Bobby looks around with wonder and curiosity in his eyes,

he has never seen a castle before and it's so big and beautiful and, uh... very, very beautiful indeed.

As Garnet ordered the front gates to be opened, we were met with a loud surprise. Louder than Eiko.

— HAPPY BIRTHDAY! — Zidane, Steiner, Freya, Quina, Amarant, that guy I don't know the name of but even he forgot his name, was it Fratley? Whatever, everyone is here. Garnet jumped back in shock, Eiko almost fainted and I swear I saw Bobby smile. Do birds smile? I don't know. They don't have teeth, but I swear Bobby is so happy.

— Happy one year anniversary, Bobby Corwen!
— All of the Pluto Knights yelled at the same time.

— Kweh! — Bobby said. I think, given the circumstances, I could translate that to “Thank you very much!”.

— I never thought I'd organize a party for a bird.
— Zidane said, as Garnet advanced and both embraced each other.

— Eugh. — Me too, Eiko. Me too... — All of this sugary talk is giving me cavities.

— We celebrate the birthday of the living. —
Said Garnet, after her lips were finally free. — Not

only should we celebrate the day they're born, but also their stay, because who knows how long is forever?

— Kweh!

— Yeah, Bobby, that's right. — Zidane said, as he patted on the chocobo's head. — We may not know if we will stay that long, but what counts is today, right?

— Kweh!

— See, I understand the Chocobo language. — Zidane smiled, as everyone looked at him with all sorts of faces, ranging from awkward to dull.

— Kweh!

— Tell me, what did he say? Anyone can try. — I asked, being an expert in “Chocobo language”. There isn't an official name, though.

— Uh... “I love you”? — Zidane took a wild guess.

— “Look at that monkey boy and his fancy tail”!
— Amarant said in a mockery tone.

— “I want to chew his hair”? — Eiko said, probably inspired by recent events.

— “Pancakes”? — Fratley suggested. I guess he’s really hungry.

— No, you silly! He said “I love you all”! — I replied.

— Ooooh... I don’t get it. I heard him say something about pancakes. — Fratley said, a bit confused. He looks confused all of the time, as if he did not belong in here and everyone is but a stranger.

— Maybe later. — Said Freya, who stood at Fratley’s side. He seems familiar with her face, and so do I to an extent. Everyone in here knew who my father was, to be honest.

— Normally, I’d expect a punchline or some stupid humor, but I guess “I love you all” counts. — Beatrix arrived in the room. — Good afternoon, My Majesty.

— You can address me by the name, Beatrix. — Said Garnet. I guess she doesn’t like to feel that important of a person compared to everyone else.

— My apologies for the lack of organization. — Said Beatrix in a very polite manner. — It’s the first time a bird is celebrating a birthday in royal grounds, so we were not sure of what to do for the

occasion. Birds are far different from us in many aspects.

— A cake is on the way! — Quina said, rushing to the kitchen.

— Do birds eat cake? — I asked. — I don't want Bobby to eat something harmful.

— I'm sure Quina knows what s/he is doing. — Said Garnet, also heading for the kitchen.

Active Time Event #1: Secret Ingredient

— What are you doing, Quina? — Said Garnet, as we went inside Alexandria's royal kitchen.

— Baking cake for Bobby Corwen! — Quina replied. — I cook for friends. My food is made with love. And I have a secret ingredient that will make cake good for your little friend!

— And what is this 'secret ingredient', may I ask? — Garnet is curious, but Quina is very protective while in the kitchen. Funny. s/he for the

most part does not seem bothered by anything, the nyou include food in the discussion and everything changes.

— It's a secret, I'm not telling!

— Is it a frog? — I said, taking a guess.

— No frog. Secret!

— Eugh, frog cake... Glad there is none of that. So... Is it truffle?

— No no.

— Caramel?

— No.

— Chocolate?

—...No. — I'm about to give up and let Quina cook, when all of sudden, a last word came to mind.

— Asparagus? — What am I saying? Could Quina ever make asparagus taste any good, in a cake!? Who knows, she's a Master Chef, after all.

— Not asparagus! — Quina said while holding a giant spoon. I heard she ate many monsters with that very spoon. — Wait and you will see. And eat too. Food is meant to be eaten.

— Okay, I give up. — Whatever it is, I’m sure it’ll taste good. I hope so. I’m afraid.

Active Time Event #2: A Knight’s Gift

— Bobby, you are a hero, and the greatest gift ever conceived to you is the gift of life! — Steiner shouted in his former knight self. — Nevermind the circumstances of birth, it’s what you do with the gift of life that determines who you are.

— Kweh!

— I wonder what that means... — Steiner said as he stroked his chin, confused like a person who had never studied bird language before. — Anyway, Happy Birthday!

— Kweh!

— Ahem. — Steiner leaned over me and whispered. — (Is that all he says?)

— Uh huh. — I nodded. — Can you make Bobby a Sir?

— I don't think so. Only our Majesty can do that.

— Well, can you ask Garnet to do it?

— I'm sorry, but I don't think that's in the constitution. — He explained. — Besides, Knighthood is bestowed upon those individuals with outstanding achievements, and I suppose your friend is too young for have done any.

— He can take short flights.

— Uh... Not that kind of achievement. I mean something done for the nation's benefit.

— Oh, I see. — I said, feeling a bit disappointed.

— Kweh. — So did Bobby.

— However, I can give you something else. — Said Steiner, who tried to cheer us up. He took something out of his pocket and gave it to me.

— What's this? — I asked, staring at the thing. It's a thing. Whatever that is, I don't know. It looks like an ordinary rock.

— This, my friend, is a heliotrope amulet. — Steiner proudly said. — It's also known as bloodstone.

— Bloodstone?

— Indeed! I have found this rare gem on my travels. It's said to increase the user's longevity and it can also dispel melancholy from the heart.

— Kweh! — Bobby is astonished, and so do I.

— Wow! Thank you very much, Steiner! — I said, as I put the amulet around Bobby's neck. He looks so cute!

And menacing, too. I won't be fooled by your kindness, Bobby. You can also be mean, like very mean. In a worm's point of view, of course. Do worms have eyes? Who knows, I could ask Doctor Tot about it.

Active Time Event #3: The Towering

— WHOA! WHAT THE KUPO! — Eiko raised her head and gasped in horror at my brothers and sisters, one stacked on the top of the other. — What's this... A living tower of Vivis!?

— Surprised? I invited them too, and they are helping with the decoration. — I said.

— Okay... It's not everyday I see such a thing. I don't mind, not at all. — Said Eiko, still terrified by the giant centipede of Black Mages.

— Do you think that's safe? — Garnet asked, as she stared at the Vivi tower with a hand over her mouth.

— Of course! We do it all the time back in the village.

— That's quite odd. — Fratley replied. He just seemed there most of the time, neither amused nor frightened by what he saw. — Did we do this sort of thing as kids, Lady Freya?

— I do remember playing as a Dragon knight with my friends. I jumped over a Moogles thinking it was a dragon, but I missed and knocked my head in a fruit container. I ended up buried under a pile of green and red apples.

— Well, that must have hurt. — Fratley tried to be polite before he could no longer hold his laughter. Freya does not look mad at all, in fact, she seems amused and that's quite a rare sight for someone who looks so serious most of the time.

Active Time Event #4: Life Lessons

— You should be glad for the kind people who looked after you, Mr. Corwen. — Said Amarant, who always looked cold and distant, leaning his back over a wall and who knows whose kind of thoughts he has in mind. Despite his attitude, he seems like a chill guy. — Trust me, a harsh world breeds harsh people and I'm lucky enough for having changed my ways.

— That's some nice advice. — Zidane said, to which Amarant looked away. — And indeed, you've changed a lot.

— Yeah, I cut my hair.

— I too noticed.

— See, I'm not used to birthday parties, though. I never had the chance to celebrate a fancy birthday, but I had to find something for Bobby. Free advice might be a gift by itself in a world you have to pay for it.

And Amarant just leaves. He goes to the main entrance and leaves the castle, no more to be seen. Well...

— I'll go buy a booze and then I'll be back. — He might have left but not without saying a word, that would be disrespectful.

— The people of Alexandria are odd. — I said.

— Definitely odd. — Zidane said.

— Kweh! — And Bobby... "Kwehled"? I wonder if that's a word...

Active Time Event #5: The Towering, Part Two

— Do you really need to put feathers in this armor, Vivi? — Said Vivi.

— Why not, Vivi? It's Bobby's birthday, let's decorate everything with feathers! — The other Vivi said.

— My legs are numb. I don't think I can keep up... — The short Vivi at the bottom said.

— Careful, Vivi! Or else everyone will fall! — The Vivi on top of all said.

— You guys are making me dizzy! — The Vivi who had a big black helmet said.

— You are strong, Vivi! — Vivi with an eye-patch said. — We can do this together!

— Okay!... Hnng! — Poor Vivi at the bottom, he's bearing all of the Vivi's weight on top of him.

— United as one! United as one! — The Vivi in the middle said.

— Vivi, bring a cup of water to Vivi! He's been complaining that his throat is dry. — Vivi with glasses gave me an order.

— Alright, Vivi! I'll do it for you!

— Wait, all of you are called Vivi!? — Eiko was shocked by the amount of Vivis she saw.

— YES! — Every single Vivi in the room said, including myself.

— Alone, we are cute Black Mages. — Vivi with glasses explained to Eiko. — But together, we are a single hive mind!

— You gotta be kidding...

— wE ARE NOT KIDDING, EIKO CAROL! — We do scare a lot of people when we all talk at the same time, and it's not different when it comes to Eiko.

— Tell me, how many Vivi's are out there? — Freya asked.

— I don't know, 52 is my guess. — Vivi with glasses sure is a smart fellow Black Mage.

— Do you know how to count? — Said Fratley, confused as everyone else's.

— I was born yesterday!

— Okay, stop! — I said, with a cup of water in hand, but my brothers didn't understand the message very well. — Stop! Stop! STOP!

— AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!... — And like domino pieces, my siblings fell one by one. I swear I saw the floor shake with their fall and I feel their pain within my head.

— Ouchie ouchie! — We yelled.

— Mother Reis.. Are you alright?

— We are, Lady Freya! — We said. Despite the previous incident, the decorations look beautiful. — Good job, everyone!

I am sure Bobby will be proud of us. It's his special day, after all.

Active Time Event #6: The Stuff of Heroes

— Burmecia is in ruins, so do I. — Said Fratley, lamenting to himself near a fountain.

— It's not that deep. — Until Amarant came in, changing the mood with his very statement.

— What am I even doing here? I should be helping my people at home.

— But instead you are here, in the company of such a great person as Freya. What a pity. — Amarant's words are bloated with sarcasm. He takes

a seat on the same bench as Fratley. — The heck is wrong with you, pal!?

— Sob... I don't know. — Fratley said, between sobs and whispers. — I feel so... So useless here. Sob... I haven't brought a single gift to Bobby.

— You don't need to. He does not deserve your pain. In fact, no one else does, if that's the best a hero can offer.

— I feel like I'm just standing here while everyone else has better things to do with their time, and I... I'm still figuring out who to be, what to do, while the others? Well... They have figured it out already.

— You talk like a depressed young lad. — Said Amarant, who sounds dismissive at first, but I know that he could just walk away and leave Fratley on his own. Instead, he talks. — So, you're the single one in this world who has not figured out yourself yet? That's bullshit, everyone is changing, for better or worse. Does an apple wonder if it'll rot after gravity pulls it out of a tree?

— What are you even saying? That I should let myself be pulled by an unseen force, no matter if I'll end up worse than I do right now?

— If that's how you interpret it...

— Are you even sure of your words?

— Well, are you? — Asked Amarant. It's like he is trying so hard to give advice and be thoughtful at the same time, yet he's still learning how to do it properly. — Eh, who cares. Perhaps I do, because worrying about what you want to be instead of being who you are, right here, right now... It is not healthy. For you, me, Freya and everyone.

— People expect me to be someone else. Someone I'm not even sure I can be.

— Then don't be, if that makes you any better. — Amarant could not stand to look at that man in his most pitiful state. — Moping around won't get you anywhere.

— I know. — Said Fratley, leaving the seat as he wanders around the fountain with a heart filled with sorrow. — At home, the citizens of Burmecia greet me everyday, they say they know me ever since I was a little kid strolling down the main avenue, that I am a legend among Dragon Knights and I feel like, for most of the time, I'm hearing about someone else's life and their greatest accomplishments. Even Freya seems to agree with those people and the

words they say, and I'm not sure of what to do other than smile and nod in approval when a stranger refers to me as this living legend, this pristine knight beloved by many, because... I have nothing to prove to them that I am.

— You are alive. I guess that counts. — I said, stepping into the conversation.

— It sure does. — Amarant said, then he looked at me. — How long have you been listening to us?

— For as much as I needed. — I replied. — Lady Crescent told me about my dad and the horrors of war they've witnessed.

— Gee, I sure hope you don't have nightmares when you go to bed. Also, happy birthday to that Chocobo of yours.

— It's fine, and thank you.

— So... Freya told you about the War of Eidolons? — Fratley asked. The corner where he stands looks so shadowy, as if the darkness is about to swallow him.

— Yes. A lot of people died when Odin clashed against Cleyra.

— Unfortunately. — Fratley stood quiet for a moment before he said anything. — And somehow, I'm alive. Sigh... I don't even know how.

— Who needs to? — Said Amarant. — Imagine being free of survivor's guilt.

— Who said I was? To this day, I think about the lives I could have saved.

— It wasn't only you who was found buried under the sand. — I said. — Maybe you helped save those people.

— Maybe... — Fratley stepped out of the shadows, but the sadness in his sight remained the same as he approached us. — I can't let my doubts and fears curl and shrivel my soul.

— Sometimes you sound so dramatic, yet genuine. Perhaps you should write a book, if that makes you any better. — Those were Amarant's last words before he walked away.

— A book... What do you think? — Said Fratley in a melancholic, yet optimistic tone.

— Sure! — I nodded. — I mean, books, paintings, any kind of art... They are good for people who are healing, or so I heard.

— Fine. — He said, taking a seat on a bench. — My thoughts keep flowing like water, I must choose every word carefully. Hmmmm... What should I call my book? Water... flow... words... Maybe... “The Fountain”? I think I’ll be here for a while.

— I see. — I said, leaving Fratley on its own. I’m sure he’ll be fine.

—Finale: The Birthday Party—

—...It’s quite boring here. — Said Eiko, walking around the table, probably imagining a cake on top of it.

— Embrace boredom. I do wish we had calm days like these. Always... — Freya looks tired. All adults I’ve seen are tired, but when it comes to appreciating life’s little moments, they take care and afford the best of it.

— What’s this? — I said, wrapping the orange ribbon Freya gave me on Bobby’s tail.

— I wore it since I was a kid. — It looks like an ordinary ribbon, but it has a lot of sentimental value. I can see in Freya's eyes.

— Thank you very much, Lady Freya!

— You're welcome.

Bobby has received so many gifts from so many people tonight. Steiner's gemstone, Freya's ribbon, a lot of them. Even Zidane offered him a pair of daggers.

— A dagger!? — Said Garnet, shocked by the sudden and unexpected gift.

— Why? It's for self defense, my dear! — Zidane's smile was priceless.

— He already has a beak. — Said Eiko. — And claws. And he bites with that giant beak of his.

— Kweh! — Instead of biting Eiko, Bobby licked her purple hair.

— Eugh! Don't do that again! — I love that expression on her face.

Aside from his heartfelt advice, Amarant also left a bag of potatoes he bought at the market before leaving in an unceremonious way. Oh wait, he is in

the corner, against the wall in his usual position. I didn't notice until now. He stays still for most of the time like he belongs to the background.

— A Pluto Knight handed me this at the entrance.
— Said Beatrix, who walked into the room carrying a box. — The Regent of Burmecia may not be here at the moment, but he sent a gift to your feathered friend.

— Well, let's see what's inside. — Zidane took one of his daggers and sliced it open. In one swing, nonetheless.

— Is this Puck's gift? — I asked as Steiner looked inside the box and took something out of it. He had no expressions in his face as he held... — A pair of shoes.

— Shoes? For birds? — Zidane questioned.

— Wait, there's a... Note? — Steiner grabbed a piece of paper that fell from the box and read it aloud. — Ahem... "For the Queen of Alexandria... I humbly accepted your invitation to Bobby Corwen's birthday, but as the former Regent of Burmecia, I have plenty of responsibilities to attend and I'm disappointed I couldn't make an appearance on this special date. Regardless, I have sent these for Bobby

Corwen and I hope they are very useful. Signed, Puck. P.S. If the socks didn't arrive it's because they probably got wet on the trip but I don't think birds need any socks so... Oh, whatever, I love you all and I wish you everything good."

—...Is that it? — I asked. Everyone struggled to form any coherent thoughts.

— Kweh! — Bobby seemed happy so everything was fine.

— I made it especially for Bobby Corwen. — Quina said as s/he came out of the kitchen with a colossal cake on a serving cart. I'm not a cake specialist but I thought it was simple and beautiful. It looked delicious yet I did not want to eat it because I wanted to appreciate its details. That was probably the most anticipated moment of the party, given how Eiko rushed in to grab some slices of the cake before she even got served.

— Tasty... This cake feels different. — Zidane made some weird faces, so did the others. I felt it too, the cake was indeed strange. — Quina?

— Yes?

— What is in the cake? I'm curious.

— No. Secret ingredient.

— Whose secret ingredient?

— It is secret. I'm not telling! But if you insist...

— I didn't insist at all—

— WORMS! — Quina shouted.

While pretty much everyone gave up eating following this sudden revelation, some expressing their disgust more than others, a single “Yum!” could be heard. We thought it was Bobby, who definitely liked the cake's flavor, but to our surprise, it was someone else.

—...I like it.

— Freya!? You gotta be kidding. My God, I'm going to puke... — Zidane rushed upstairs as laughter emanated in the room and Freya enjoyed eating every slice of the cake.

— I may have forgotten my favorite flavors, but I don't dare eat this. — Said Fratley, who will probably remember this scene for the rest of his life.

And so will I.

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